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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to develop an understanding of retraining from the perspective of those who have experienced it--to know more about how and why they decided to undertake the process of acquiring new or additional work skills, how they learned about the alternatives available to them, and what feelings accompanied this experience. Research was conducted using focus groups of the following types of persons: (1) workers retraining as a result of being displaced by job cut-backs or plant closures; (2) workers retraining in order to seek better jobs, either with their present employer or a new employer; (3) workers enrolled in company-sponsored retraining programs; and (4) farmers training for nonagricultural employment. Participants included men and women representing a range of ages, ethnicity, and educational backgrounds. The participants reported a variety of reasons for getting retraining, mostly as a result of losing a job or selling their farms; they had to overcome a number of psychological and emotional barriers, such as disbelief, guilt, isolation, lack of information about options, pride, and fear. The knowledge gained in the study will be used to assist in the creation of public service announcements and other broadcast materials to encourage dislocated workers to begin thinking now about the necessity of retraining in order to avoid future displacement. (KC)

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ED280996

National Association of NAB BROADCASTERS

The Broadcasting Industry Productivity Council

Work Resource and Retraining Initiative

A STUDY OF ATTITUDES ASSOCIATED WITH RETRAINING

PART I

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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OBJECTIVE

Radio and television, as the primary source of news and information for the majority of Americans, are an effective means of reaching — in a direct, personal way — those who need to know about the training options and programs available to them.

This study, funded by an Economic Development Administration grant, was conducted to develop an understanding of retraining from the perspective of those who have experienced it -- to know more about how and why they decided to undertake the process of acquiring new or additional work skills, how they learned about the alternatives available to them, and what feelings accompanied this experience.

Part Two will examine the attitudes of workers in fields where employment opportunities are declining.

This knowledge will be used to assist in the creation of public service announcements and other broadcast materials to encourage these individuals to begin thinking now about the necessity of retraining in order to avoid future displacement.

METHODOLOGY

Discussion groups, commonly known as "focus" groups, were conducted in November, 1986. Recruiting targets were as follows:

- Workers retraining as a result of being displaced by job cut-backs or plant closures.
- Workers retraining in order to seek better jobs, either with their present employer or a new employer.
- Workers enrolled in company sponsored retraining programs.
- Farmers training for non-agricultural employment.

Representatives from each of these four categories were recruited to attend the focus groups via telephone interviews.

Two sessions were conducted in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and two in Peoria, Illinois. These markets were selected on the basis of ready access to workers in retraining programs and availability of quality recruiting and interviewing facilities.

Understanding of the farm situation was further enhanced through telephone interviews with training professionals serving farmers in Illinois and Nebraska.

To begin each discussion, respondents introduced themselves to each other and briefly described the job they had left and their retraining experience. This information served as the basis for the evolution of the conversation, probing for such things as reasons for decisions, feelings that accompanied them, resources used and advice to others in similar situations.

LIMITATIONS AND USES

Focus group discussions are exploratory in nature. They are an excellent tool for better understanding consumer language, the range of consumer response and experience, and for generating hypotheses. They do, however, represent a small and interactive set of respondents and are more subjective in nature than is quantitative research.

FINDINGS & COMMENTS

I. THE PEOPLE

This study included men and women representing a range of ages, ethnicity and educational backgrounds. Perhaps the best way to begin to understand and have a feeling for the people who shared their experiences with us is to let them speak for themselves; tell their stories in their own words:

> "When I moved, I went to two semesters in college when I was 18. Then I had a baby. I didn't have any babysitters, so I wasn't able to continue. I moved here and I started job hunting and I was having problems trying to find a job as a secretary, receptionist because everyone is asking for typing. So I heard about the council for the Spanish speaking and they have a free program there to learn how to type. I heard about it through my dad. He knew a friend. So I went there. Basically, there were two parts to the program -the typing part, office procedures, and the other part, which is grammar and spelling. I was kind of ahead of the class going through school and through college. I really didn't have to take that part. Just the typing. After about two months, they put me in on-the-job training there at the center, for free. I wasn't getting paid. But about a month later, I got hired. So I worked there for about eight months and then I heard of another community-based program through neighborhood housing services, and there I was an administrative assistant and I worked there for about three-and-a-half years. They they ran out of money, so I ended up working for the city and I've been there two-and-a-half years now. They have tuition reimbursement incentives to have their employees better themselves. It has to be job related or a good upward-mobility thing. And with our new computers, they let me take this class and I have to fund the money, but if I pass it with a B or better, I get my money refunded in about six weeks. And they'll pay for your books. I think we get about $500 per year for that. Right now they're trying to reclass my job to an administrative assistant. So I'm hoping to stay there a little longer and then work myself up to manager."
>
> (Retraining funded by employer, Milwaukee)

> "All my life I have been interested in auto mechanics. My trade is auto mechanic. But auto mechanics never pay that great. And job security benefits aren't there. I went to work in a factory and posted for an apprenticeship program as a machine repairman and was accepted. Unfortunately, with my type of trade, machine repairman, you have a tendency to move around a little bit. You never really stay in one place very long. Machine repairmen have a nasty habit of about six to ten years and they move on to another place. You're always looking for a new challenge. And after about that length of time you've learned the machinery at that location

and it becomes boring and repetitious. You move on to another location and pick up a new challenge. It had been a number of years since I served my apprenticeship and even up until a few years ago, the company I worked for, they would send you, when you got a new piece of equipment, they would send you out to the manufacturer's seminars, schools. We learned a new piece of equipment. But with the hard times that they've had in their industry, they knocked that off about five, six years ago. And being out in the job market, I found that most employers want you to be more versatile. They don't want you just to be a machine repairman and handle the mechanical part. They also want you to be able to handle electronics along with the mechanical part. So it was either take a locating job or go back to school, pick up the credits, pick up the extra knowledge I needed to go back into my field at the level I was at prior to. I had a small medical problem earlier in the year. Three months after I got laid off, I discovered I had cancer. That's another reason. You tell employers you have cancer or a heart condition, whatever, they kind of walk you towards the door, even though technically it's against the law. They're not even supposed to ask you those questions, but they ask you; and if you refuse to answer, they lead you to the door anyway. My reason to go back to school was threefold: Pick up the knowledge I needed, to show a future employer that I am willing to retrain, I'm not stagnant in my occupation, and it also gives me some lead time between my medical problems and being back out in the job market."

(Retrained after being laid off, Milwaukee)

"Several years back when we were farming, I got a life insurance license, to sell life insurance only. I sold just enough to pay for getting the license, which my wife and I both got. She dropped hers and I kept mine. I kept renewing it over the years even though I was farming and getting bigger and bigger in farming and had no intention of ever getting back into it. Then the farm situation changed, deteriorated very rapidly in the late 70's and early 80's to the point there's a lot of people out there today, they're just hanging on by the skin of their teeth, They're hanging on because they owe so much money that the bankers won't let them quit. They can't sell out because they're so far in debt. So my last year was 1983, and I sold out in January of '84. I still had the life insurance license. I really didn't do anything for awhile. Then one day I was in town — we were still living on the farm at that time — I was in Henry one day. I banked in Henry, and bumped into a guy that was in the insurance business and he said, 'What are you doing now? You sold out farming, didn't you?' I said, 'Yes. I'm sort of looking around.' He said, 'You still have that insurance license? I'd like to talk to you. My business is expanding, and I'd like somebody that knows farmers and knows how to talk to farmers in the insurance business for me.' So I got back into it. He sent me to some schooling. I went to Pekin and

took some classes. I finally got all my licenses and became an insurance broker next year. Since then, I quit that man and am on my own now, am an independent. It's a good, clean business. We've got one newspaper in Henry and there happened to be a notice on the window — Displaced Worker Program. My wife saw it and said, 'I wonder if we'd qualify for that?' The next day I went by and wrote down the number. I called and she said, 'Your closest training facility is in Peoria.' She asked a few questions, like how long you've been out of farming. You had to have made 70% of your income from farming to get into the program. I said I qualify for that because I made 100% of my income from farming. I said what does this qualify? She said this qualifies you and your wife and any of your children that would be over 21 that made their living off of farming. She said go and they'll give you some tests — English test, math tests, like the A.C.T. test. I'm in a night course there now, marketing management. We took these tests, then they sat us down with a counselor, then pick what you want. About the only thing that matched up with being an airline mechanic or farmer was horticulture and sheet metal, welding. I didn't want to do that. I welded all my life. So the counselor said, 'You're in the insurance business. Maybe this management class would be nice. It's a wonderful teacher.' He said one night, 'One thing about these adult classes, you guys are here because you want to be here. And most of these people get better grades because they want to learn.'"

(Retrained farmer, Peoria)

"I was working in the lumber yard in the back, helping customers. It was full-time, right after I finished school. I wanted anything full-time and that's just what came up. I worked there for a whole summer and I didn't want to go through the winter working out there. I started applying at all the industrial parks that were around my neighborhood and this company was one of them. Just by luck, I got hired as a mail handler and was sorting all the mail that the company got in every day, then distributing to all the departments. I got to know a lot of managers and supervisors of the whole company, and there was a job opening in the engineering department. I wasn't going to school then. I didn't have any qualifications besides in junior high and high school that's all I took was math and drawing courses. So I had a lot of drawings to show them. He said he would give me a try in working in engineering. I told them I would like to go to school for it. I really like it. I've always wanted to go back to school, but my parents kind of talked me away from it until I found this program at the company."

(Retrained by employer, Milwaukee)

"I work at Keystone Steel and Wire. I'm a nail machine operator, operate 11 of them at once. I was laid off three-and-a-half years from there, at which time I worked in building maintenance at the First National Bank. I went to ICC for two-and-a-half years, got a one-year certificate for industrial maintenance. Then I went for computer science and took a lot of math courses because I wanted to go toward electronics. But I was recalled at Keystone just as I graduated, and I got all kinds of job offers from local area places, but I had returned to Keystone. My seniority at Keystone stopped at nine years and eight months, so to be able to get a ten-year vested pension, I had to go back for four months. And I had this job. I was making $5 an hour at and starving. And I said, 'If I go back to Keystone, maybe I'll make $9 an hour. At least I'll get my vested pension out of it and if they lay me off, I'm really not that much worse off, because I had graduated.' So I went back to Keystone, and I went to an icky job, a machine operator. It's so loud you have to scream in the next person's ear, and it's really not a bad job. I make much better than $9 an hour, so it's hard to leave. And it looks like it's forever. We're going great guns. They're expanding rapidly."

(Retrained after being laid off, Peoria)

These stories were not exceptions. These are the people who have found a road through the disaster, risen like the phoenix, from the ashes of their previous life. They have worked at a range of jobs and trades — ones they advanced through in the good days, and ones they accepted out of desperation as circumstances changed. Here are a few examples, each representing one individual's work history:

- production line worker, technician, service station owner, dump truck owner/operator, receiving clerk and warehouseman, expeditor and security guard.

- cashier, clerical worker, salesperson, fast food worker, bank teller and customer service representative.

- airline mechanic, carpenter, salesmen, farmer, insurance salesman.

- local newspaper advertising salesman, general office worker and typist, real estate salesman, reporter, store manager and certified nurse assistant.

- factory, gas station, warehouse and restaurant worker, and insurance salesperson.

- pipefitter, millwright, furniture salesman, computer operator, draftsman and mechanical and civil engineering technician.

- auto body repairman, stock boy, mold operator, forklift operator, millwright, Cobol programmmer and purchase order clerk.

- inspector, machine operator, mail order packer, counter clerk at cleaners, factory worker, hotel maid, laundry worker and appliance repairperson.

II. THE TRAUMA OF CHANGE

Many of those interviewed were displaced workers. Individuals who know, first hand, the trauma of change. There is a pattern that emerges from their experience, not unlike the stages of working through grief. And it is grief, in the sense that there is a need to mourn for the lost life-style, the lost past, and the lost plans and hopes for the future.

Denial and Disbelief

The first stage is one of denial. It is the feeling that, no matter what happens to someone else, this cannot happen to me. The realities of the world cannot alter my known existence. And whether a person likes or dislikes his current lot in life, it at least offers the security of being known.

> "The hardest thing for a person to do is just to take the first step. Because you'll sit there forever. You get fairly comfortable. You're miserable, but you're just fairly comfortable, and you say, 'I can't do any better than this.' So you just sit there."

When the truth does become evident — the job is lost, the bank is foreclosing — there is still disbelief. "Surely a better crop is around the corner." "This is only a temporary lay-off." "I'll enjoy it for a few months, and then I'll be back at work."

> "Everything is good. You've got money in your pocket. You've got a nice car. You wish you could get your work cut down to three days a week so you have more time. Everything is good and all of a sudden: the first layoff. I figured there were no jobs right now, I'll just wait till that shifts. I'll just wait till I'm in the right place at the right time. And it gets worse and worse. I was out there at $3.35 an hour. And it isn't any fun."

"I wish the transition would have been a little slower. They're flipping over too fast. I couldn't see it coming at all. I figured within a few months, I'll be back, that we're just going through a recession period, this type of thing. And this recessionary period hasn't got any better. It's just gotten worse because businesses have failed tremendously since that time. Farmers and people like this have gone out of business."

"I think everybody starts out thinking this is going to be a free vacation. Essentially, that's the way it starts out. You get your reimbursement through, when you're laid off, you get this sub-pay. And it sounds like a real good deal. You think it's going to be two, maybe three weeks, maybe a month till you get called back. And pretty soon, you're running into six months, a year. And you're sitting there and saying, 'I've got to do something with my life because I can't sit still, sit in front of the TV set and eat popcorn all day while everybody else is out there grabbing up all the jobs.' Then you've got to go out and compete with the younger generation for the jobs."

"I have yet to really function 100% at my new job because I've got this little thing saying, 'You've got assembly line work. You've got all this experience at different jobs. When one of them opens up, they'll call you back.' The hassle of it all is like you say, you're only two or three guys down, You're just waiting to move up and you never move up because they keep laying somebody else off."

"In the back of my mind, I haven't given up on the company at all. I'm sitting here and waiting in the back of my mind for them to give me a call and say, 'Come on in.' That's really tormenting. I'm trying to give up on them, and I can't quit. From day one when I got out of high school, that's where I went to work."

"Even when they lay you off, you think it's only going to be temporary. You can take the time to clean house, do whatever you want to for awhile and then go back to work."

Feelings of disbelief are fostered by family and friends in their well-intentioned encouragement — that "you can make it", or that their name is near the top of the list to be called back.

"A lot of people thought that the company was going to start back up again, even after a year went by. They'd say, 'It's going to start any day. Some other brewery is going to come in here and buy it and they're going to start it up and hire us back.' They were wrong. It never did happen."

> "What's worse, when I got laid off both my parents were in the office. My dad was an engineer. My mom, a secretary. Every day we'd come. They'd say, 'Don't give up hope. We're recalling people.' And they'd say, 'You're number five. You'll be called back.' And I'm anticipating being called back. Then all of a sudden, 3,000 more people were laid off. Then they start calling people back. I used to see one guy coming from Arizona that was called back three times, and then he'd lose his job down there. And it's cruel what people do to you. They have no information, but they pass it on. It's like a rumor starting. They started them when we first got laid off. We heard the rumors. We're not shutting down. Rumors are what killed the people."

There is an interesting analogy. When talking with people about pre-planning for home health care or nursing home needs, even people in their sixties and seventies, there is always denial. It's something for people older than they are to worry about, or it will never happen to them. Similarly, even when people around them are being laid off, companies moving away, there is the conviction that this can't happen to them. It isn't their plan for themselves. It means a person has to admit there are situations beyond his control that affect his life. Lack of control over one's own life can be difficult to admit.

Acknowledgement

At a later point comes the recognition that one's life path has been inexplicably altered. Many people get to this point only when desperate circumstances mean they cannot do otherwise. The need to earn money has arisen, or the need to again have a sense of purpose and meaning to one's life. In rare cases, someone may sit a person down and talk frankly with him.

> "My wife told me, 'Look Roger. You're 30 years old. You're going to have to do something. What do you want to do?' I felt just like I did when I was in high school when people said, 'What do want to do when you get out of high school?' Gee, I don't know. I never really thought about it. I said, 'I want to work where I did.' She said, 'You can't work there.' I had no idea what I wanted to do."

Sense of failure

This acknowledgement of the situation can contribute to a sense of failure. This is especially true among farmers.

> "I don't owe any people, but we didn't own, we hadn't paid for all that. So what we get in has to pay for our farm and we don't have an income."
>
> "We have friends, a young couple, he's about 35 and she's not quite that old. And they got in a position of farming where it was not their choice to get out. They couldn't make it. It made a very big strain on their marriage."
>
> "It's like losing a member of your family. The decisions have to be made very cold, very calculating. You have to be sure. You'll never do it if you use your heart. You have to use your head, We were not in the position that all the farmers are in right now, but we could not see where our children were going to be able to take over the farm. Every time I feel bad about leaving the farm, I listen to the farm show at noon; and she says what the prices are and I know that they're paying twice as much to put it in the ground as they are to get it out, and that makes me feel better."

The Depression was an "event," an acknowledged and clearly named national problem. The current crises are not. If the Depression is analogous to a declared world war, the current situation is guerrilla warfare, a Vietnam. The age groups most affected grew up in bountiful times.

> "We grew up in an era where they told us that this country was the horn of plenty, the American dream. Everybody is going to own a home; everybody's got two cars in the garage. And we believed it."
>
> "I was born and raised in sheet metal work, which is a viable trade. I never thought I would be laid off from anywhere. My father was never laid off. He transferred from this job to that job for more money, or bargained himself off to the highest bidder."

Isolation

There is also a sense of isolation and frustration.

> "I lost a lot of sleep. There were a lot of nights I'd sit there and drink coffee and cry and drink more coffee."
>
> "I'd go places and see people working, and I knew I could do that job better and quicker. Nothing against the individual, but I know I could do it better than you. Or I know I've got some certain skills, but no place to do them. To me, it was extremely frustrating. I'd see a truck driving down the road and doing a poor job and think I could do a lot better than that; why can't I have it?"

Pride

This is America, the land of success stories. Our vision of ourselves does not allow for failure. They often feel too ashamed or insecure — or too independent — to ask for help. Often programs sponsored by the government tend to be confused as welfare, and pride prohibits using them.

> "People are afraid and it's like they would be humiliated going out and looking for something and asking for help. It's very degrading."
>
> "They thought it was a humiliating thing to ask for help and go through a government-subsidized program. Some didn't know about it. When we went into it, I called people that I knew who worked with me. I said, 'They've got a program out here going for you. Now is the time to get into it, get some retraining. You may get a chance to get a job.' But they'd say they're weren't interested."
>
> "I had friends that thought to get into the dislocated workers program you had to make $1,000 or less a year or your wife had to be on ADC or something in order for them to qualify."

Fear

Throughout it all, there is the fear — of the unknown, of being out of control, of not knowing what to do now.

> "When you're at the factory, you're making big bucks and you think it's forever. You'll retire and have it made. Then all of a sudden, you don't have it made. It is frightening, especially because I'm older. And the older you get, the harder it is to get a job."
>
> "I think the biggest barrier was believing that I could do something else. After so many years of doing one thing, now can I really go out there and succeed at something else?"

And there is the fear, and lack of knowledge, about retraining . . .

III. THE FEAR OF FAILURE

Retraining is associated with the idea of going back to school and the image of school, to many, is that of a place where grown-ups teach children, a place they've graduated from and left behind with perhaps lingering negative memories of tests, grades, personality conflicts and lack of power or control over their lives.

> "I think what keeps people from going to school is fear. I looked at it at one time and thought, 'I don't know if I could learn that.' You always make the mistake of picking up these technical books and you browse through the middle of the things and you are lost. It looks so complicated. But if you start from page one and go to page two, you learn a little at a time, a little more every day. It isn't long at all and you really know it. You have it together. People look at it, by the time I get out of school I'll be so old. Somebody wrote Dear Abby one time, some woman wanted to know if she should go to school for four years to get her degree. She's hesitating because when she gets out of school, she'll be 40. 'Dear Abby, what do I do?' She wrote back and said, 'How old will you be in four years from now if you don't go to school?' That always stuck with me."

There is a fear of going back — to a time when the world was more black and white, when one either had the right answer or one didn't, one passed or failed. Grown men and women wonder if they can polish up their studying skills, remember formulae, pass formal tests.

> "I was really scared on my first day to go back, because it had been a long time since I've been in the school atmosphere. That morning I got up and said maybe I shouldn't do it. But I said to myself, 'You'd better do it or no one is going to do it for you and no one is going to help you better yourself but myself.' And I love it. It's a lot of studying because I work all day long. And I go on Saturdays. But it's worth it."

> "They don't realize that this individual has been away from school for 10, 12 years. It's more difficult for him or her to get back into the groove of an education and really sit down and study. Plus the fact you've got a family to take care of. They don't help the grown-ups as compared to the younger students who are right out of high school."

"You're afraid to go back to school because you're afraid you aren't going to be as smart as the next person."

"The first day I was ready to leave because the instructor we had, he could write on blackboards faster than anything you've seen in your life. He was about to drive us nuts. At the end of class, everybody agreed out in the hallway we weren't going to make it. We were going to quit. It was way over our head. We couldn't comprehend all this stuff. We had been out of school for so long. It was rough."

They do not feel their real-world experience will have prepared them better for school, but may see the two as very unrelated to each other. It may be hard to think of school as offering the kind of practical advice needed to get a job.

"I felt a little intimidated when I started going to school because it was kind of in a way erasing a part of an idea that I did have, and using mathematics rather than just going by feel."

For many, the idea of attending classes offered at a college represents a psychological barrier as well. They may not have completed high school, or may not have what they believe to be the necessary credentials for "college." In this sense, high schools may be a more acceptable source of training.

"You know the main reason it took me so long to find out I could even go to the college? My belief has always been that in college you have to have two years of a foreign language. You have to have two years of advanced math. To go to this school, you don't have to have that. I went to talk to a counselor just to get advice. He said, 'You don't have to have that.'"

"Years ago most high schools ran night courses. You could go to a night course in composition writing, shorthand, math. You could go there if you were a machinist, for a nominal fee. They don't have those anymore. At the high schools it would be a community program, it's closer to you. High school is close to you than a university. I have three children in high school, so I'm familiar with the high school. If they offered things at that high school, you might be willing to go one or two nights a week — refresher courses — before you go into massive retraining. Some people get into massive retraining and all of a sudden they're shocked. It's more than they can handle and they walk out."

"A lot of colleges offer it, but you have a lot of people out there who haven't finished high school. So to mention college to them is unattainable. Or they really didn't do that good in high school."

Aside from fear, going to school also represents the very real problem of cutting into the time when one could be looking for a job or working.

"They say, 'Why don't you go find a job instead of going back to school and being something you're never going to be. Or learn something that you're not smart enough to be."

"I don't think there's enough counseling on retraining or counseling on the stresses of retraining. Everybody, you talk about retraining it sounds like you just apply, you just pick up and go to school. That's fine and dandy. But what happens with your house payments? Kids have to eat, have clothes. And there's no maintenance funds available, even if they pay for the schooling."

A way around the fear of "going back to school" is to have a greater fear of going nowhere, and realizing they are not alone in the quandry.

"The advice that I got, not that I went out of my way to talk to anybody, but is was, 'The first $3.35 an hour job that comes along, take it, take it.' And you see somebody working, where you're out shoveling tar or whatever they do, $3.35 an hour, that sounds terrible. And then you've got four people telling you, 'Grab it, take it. What's the matter with you? You should be down there.' And you feel like, 'Are you nuts? You go. I'm not going down there.'"

"I don't believe this is the right way to do it, but the way you get over the fear of going to school is by having a more tremendous fear of going nowhere. I'm going to be living in a tent in city park next week. So they take the lesser of two fears and go for it."

"You say, 'How do you tell people they should retrain?' Would you go to a doctor that hasn't kept up with medical science for the last 20 years. Today, I don't care what job you're in, you have to keep up with that job. As far as the fear of going back to school, I think once you realize that there's a lot of people in the same position, and you'll get out of school what you put into it, if you work at it. They're not going to drill a hole in your head and pour it in. It doesn't work that way."

IV. THE WILL TO SUCCEED

What is it, then, that makes some people seek out retraining against all these odds?

They put the past behind them.

> "It was like a bomb being dropped on you because one moment you we were going great, and the next moment that was it and you're kind of numb for awhile. I kept busy. But a lot of them, I still know them, they're in the doldrums. They're in a rut. I don't know if they're ever going to get out of it."

They manage to depersonalize the experience and understand it in its broader context as a societal trend.

> "The menial jobs are gone, where you used to take your hat and put it in the locker with your brain, put on your overalls and go out. Those jobs are gone. They're getting rid of people like myself — expeditors, time keepers, anything that's a non-productive type job or what they call indirect labor. They're getting rid of these jobs. And the only way you can get a decent job nowadays is if you're retrained or work at MacDonald's or as a security guard. That's what I did after I got laid off. I worked for a security firm, minimum wage, $3.35 an hour. And I was going around looking for a job. I worked my way up to $3.70 and they told me, 'You're doing terrific.' I can't support a family on that."

> "Times are changing and you have to really keep up with it. Especially in the secretarial field, office field, with all these new technologies."

> "The year I was going through that transitional stage, I did spend a lot of time in the library. I read tons of books — what different people are doing with their lives, what this guy did, that guy did. A couple of books I read, they were talking about society as a whole, America was more or less getting out of the factory-type smokestack, and more or less moving into service-oriented type things. One thing I made a decision on then was I might as well hang it up. Not as a whole, but basically my point of view was to forget the smokestack type of industry and go into some kind of service type industry. I knew that long range, as far as a career in a factory, that's over with."

"Manufacturing jobs are disappearing. They're all going over to foreign countries — Korea, Japan, Turkey, China, and all these countries with the low labor are in line waiting for these menial jobs. And they want to industrialize so bad. So our country has to do something else. It has to go into technical jobs. That's the only way to find work — get into the technical fields and hope you'll find something."

"Talking about retraining, this foreman that I know, they're reorganizing and they're also going through retraining classes right now and reorganization type classes. So it seems like the whole country is in a different trend, like things are shifting. And if you don't shift with it, it's going to be like a tree. If you don't bend with the breeze, you're going to break."

They are optimists.

"I didn't know what I was going to do. I was a bottle label inspector. Where can you go from there? I did it for 23 years. So I had to have something. My wife said, 'Word processing is a big thing,' and I said I'd try it. So I went over there and took that. I just feel it's a job. I really don't see any future in it. I feel you can get another job better if you have a job. When I was off 15 months, I went 15 months and no work and nobody would hire me. Then I got these two jobs, so maybe another year there will be another job even better."

"It bothered me I didn't have a job. But I didn't let my life fall to pieces. I didn't go crazy. I know people that got laid off and never worked a day since, just because it hit them so hard that they just lost it. Stress and heart attacks. One guy died a week after he got laid off, and I know that's what it was. After he found out we were going to get laid off, you could see him just go downhill."

Instead of seeing the glass half empty, they see it as half full. They realize that this can be an opportunity, a chance to get out of the rut.

"I liked it. I may have been a little uncomfortable because I felt that I was doing real well. I thought I had a good grasp of everything before. But starting new, ground one, starting at the bottom again, it's a challenge."

"I'd been on a job for 20 some years that I did because I had to. Then it comes to a point where you have an opportunity to do something you've always wanted to do, you were always interested in. So you head in that direction."

"You never think about being out of work. But I read a lot of books about people. Many companies, it was like hanging a carrot in front of them and they never fulfilled what the employee thought they were going to get from the company. I wanted to get involved in something where that would never happen to me again. More or less be your own boss, pulling your own strings. Maybe it's a dream a lot of people have. I always wanted to be my own boss. Because you can't find security nowhere. The only security I could find was in myself. So I had to find something that I could control. Nobody is going to tell me what to do. It's all up to me. That's a tough decision to make. You don't have people telling you what to do. You've got to go out there and make those decisions yourself. But comparing those two, there's really no comparison. Because I made up my mind they were never going to do it to me again."

While it may remain scary because it is the unknown, it is then no longer a threat.

"I worked a fast food place for five years and then I went to the bank, so that was a totally different change. That was scary. I was really excited because that was something I always wanted to get into, banking, but it was a totally different change. You're giving up something that you're very comfortable with for something different. So I had very mixed emotions."

They are now thinking in terms of "learning/growth" rather than the more dogmatic "going back to school."

"I plan on taking one more class. One at a time. And slowly but surely. But I feel from the way this new training is, people in my age bracket, you stand in the tremendous position, once employers start recognizing what we have, as engineers where I work and other companies, that they really don't know what goes out in the shop. They know what goes on in their own office, but when it gets down to the shop, why you can't do it that way. And I've got quite a bit of shop experience. So I plan on making a good engineer."

"They had openings in certain classes, free education until it helped us get back on our feet. And they had data processing and so forth which is probably more modern, but I'm at an age where I knew that perhaps the office people would not be as willing to hire an older person. I chose certified nurse assistant to work in a nursing home. Most of my aunts and uncles are nursing home age. I knew how to get along with them. I just got hired part-time till I finish my certificate out at the home in Lincoln. I'm halfway through the course, carrying a 97 average. It's different and exciting."

Especially in the case of those who enrolled in a retraining program before the desperation stage, there was a strong feeling of choice and planning. They saw the beginning of a new career path, or had identified a goal, and did what they had to do to get there. In this sense, the training was not an end in itself, but a means to an end and put it in a more meaningful perspective.

> "When I decided to go to school, I was in a small town, not doing too much. I had a factory job. I worked for my dad. But all of a sudden I decided I wanted to get out of town. So I went back to school."

> "I had a two-year degree, while I was getting the two-year degree I kind of wanted more. I wanted to get more out of it. All of a sudden the opportunity was presented to go farther, so I grabbed it."

> "I applied for a very good job with a company. I was one of four candidates for that job. When the decision was made, and I didn't get the job, I asked them to be candid with me, what the deciding factor was. It was the lack of formal training. I felt hurt. When you're down to one of four finalists for the job and you've been interviewed three times. It's a nation-wide company, a mucho-buck job, it hurt to be told 'we know you can do the job; your past experience is there and we talked to your former employer. But we have a candidate with formal training.' From that point, I knew what I had to do in order to get a good job was to get that formal training. There was no doubt that I could do the job. I've been doing it for years. But they wanted that formal training. That was the turning point."

> "There was an opening in the city for a building inspector. They called my supervisor and said I would be able to do the job because I had on-the-job experience. But they rejected my application because I didn't have the degree. I didn't have the schooling for that specific job. So I could have been able to have a $25,000 job, but they wouldn't take me because of the schooling. That was my turnaround to go back to school because you're going to have that paper that said you went to school and you had this training, so you can get paid what you're worth. You're probably worth more than that. So sometimes when they say work experience counts, that's not true in a lot of cases. I'm happy where I am now, but I want to do better. I know I could do more than just office work."

Finally, they have a realistic attitude about monetary rewards. Lower wages are readily acknowledged. The idea of meaningful work, work one wants to do, seems to take precedence.

> "I'd rather have the profession and get paid a little than have a job and get paid a lot, where you can't wait to be done."

> "I'm happy with the job I do. I really enjoy it. I haven't enjoyed any job more, the satisfaction. The pay is rotten. You've got to draw a fine line, the pay or the job. I'd rather be happy at the job than the pay."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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Those who undertake retraining before it becomes a necessity will find their task a much easier one. However, too often "vulnerable" individuals wait too long, not antiticpating that their job/company may be in danger or thinking it won't happen to them.

Then retraining becomes a necessity rather than a choice. Pressed to earn a living, to take any job; their perspective becomes short-term rather than long-term.

To be worthwhile, retraining must be undertaken with a positive frame of mind. To do this, most individuals must overcome a number of psychological and emotional barriers:

- Disbelief. Even after the fact of losing a job, thinking the company/job will come back; not letting go of the past.
- Guilt. The burden of feeling a personal failure; that it is something her or she did wrong rather than a broader situation permeating American life.
- Isolation. The feeling that no one else has the problem.
- Unfamiliarity. Lack of information about the help and options that are available.
- Pride. Even when aware of programs, the feeling that to use them would be humiliating and represent taking welfare or charity. That he or she should be able to handle this problem without assistance.
- Fear. Fear of starting over; of going back to a learning situation; of failure. This fear can paralyse a person and make him or her unwilling to take another risk.

Overcoming these barriers, especially in the current environment, requires tremendous courage on the part of individuals:

- To realize they are not being pessimists, but realists; that a change has to be made.
- To be willing to accept the challenge of starting anew. To look ahead, not back.
- To absolve any sense of guilt, to understand that what is happening to them is part of a broader picture and beyond their control.
- To see the opportunity that this negative situation presents.
- To establish personal support systems that will help overcome stress and fear.
- To work through the maze and learn what programs exist and how they apply to them.